1: Rosen E-5 (1901-1902) 1924 SK6 Choroti SK6

776 [764] character.[1] When there has been a death in a village, certain precautionary measures have to be taken in order that the spirit who caused the death may not in some way or other work further evil.

But also on all other possible occasions the spirits are capable of working harm, indeed, Karsten is of opinion that the Indians, even when doing such commonplace acts as eating and drinking, fear that malicious spirits may surreptiously effect an entrance into them along with the food or drink.[2] That the Indians have this belief is not so very remarkable. Similar conceptions are to be found among many peoples in different continents, and have also been widely spread in Europe. To mention one instance; in olden times on yawning or sneezing there was the custom of making the sign of the cross before the mouth, a custom founded on the fear that the devil or some of his kindred should slip in through the open mouth.

751 As a means of protecting themselves against evil spirits, or for securing, in a magical way, other advantages, the Choroti make use of a variety of devices, the most important of which are the covering of the body, painting of the face, dyeing textiles and other objects red, tattooing, wearing of amulets and certain ornaments, singing, blowing of whistles and shaking rattles, beating of drums, dancing, games of hazard, cutting or pulling out of hairs, and blood-letting.

The custom, previously mentioned, of the girls at their first menstruation keeping their heads covered with a cloth, is an instance of the first-mentioned magical means of protection.

302 751 At dances and lovers' meetings the Indians paint their faces (see page 78), but they adorn themselves by face-painting also on other occasions. As an instance, men as well as women usually had their faces painted when visiting us in our camp. At the time we took this to be a manifestation of Indian vanity, but after having read Karsten's detailed account of the reasons for painting the face among the Indians, I am more inclined to the belief that this painting had been applied as a protection against such unknown spirit forces as might possibly threaten them in the camp of the whites.

831 302 751 That painting of the face is done at dances and meetings of a sexual character, is a circumstance connected with the Indian belief that occasions

[1] Karsten (1), p. 36, and (4), p. 17.
[2] Karsten (3), p. 205.

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of that kind are especially apt to make it easy for the spirits to acquire possession of human beings. When a woman paints her face, that fact may, therefore, indirectly constitute a sign that she desires sexual intercourse, although the painting may perhaps have been done for the magical reasons above indicated.[1]

On page 58 I have remarked that on a reed-casing for keeping ostrich plumes the holes and the edges of the lids were painted red. This red-painting cannot very well be of a decorative character, seeing that there is not much of the paint visible when the lid is closed. According to my opinion, it is very probable that the paint has been applied in order to protect the delicate ostrich plumes contained in the casing from sustaining harm from evil spirits. The fact is that there is, among the Indians, a wide-spread belief that decay and similar processes are caused by evil spirits, on account of which it has been customary among certain Indian tribes to paint not only corpses but also grave equipment with red paint for the purpose of preservation against decay. And we also possess positive evidence that among certain Indian tribes the custom prevails of providing the property of the living with a similar magically protective, painting.

When through Karsten's paper on Indian conceptions as to the significance of painting,[2] my attention had been drawn to these circumstances, I took to examining most of the objects I had found as grave furniture at Quebrada del Toro and Puna de Jujuy (Argentina) in order to ascertain whether any of these objects had been painted before being put with the dead.[3] This examination revealed that nine wooden objects seemed to be painted all over with red paint, but as I, owing to the objects having lain such a long time in the ground, was unable with certainty to decide whether these objects really were painted, or whether their red colour was due to the natural colour of the wood, I had the objects in question submitted to chemical examination. It was then established that the objects were painted, and that the paint consisted of ferrix oxide, almost pure,[4] (so therefore not uruku, which is prepared from Bixa Orellana).

[1] Cf. Karsten (4), Chap. I.

[2] Karsten (4), Chap. I.

[3] As a result of the fact that all the ethnographical and archæological collections of the Riksmuseum are stored in most unsuitable premises, it has not been possible to find all of the objects.

[4] Analytical report No. 211954, Chemico-Technical Bureau (Kemiska Tekniska Byrån).